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AUTHOR Anderson, Edmund A.
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ABSTRACT

Two aspects of a 9-month intensive course in Indonesian are outlined: the component introducing language use in Indonesian social situations, and the choice of instructional materials. The language of social situations is introduced systematically in a series of combinations of speaker, location, and topic, and includes a substantial segment on communicating emotions. The process of collecting and selecting classroom materials that were sociolinguistically sensitive for this component involved (1) defining the basic topics needed, (2) developing a descriptive matrix of 60 possible social situations, (3) eliciting and recording relevant coversations, (4) seeking the advice of native speakers to determine the conversations' appropriateness, and (5) transcribing them for class lessons. The materials were intended to illustrate stylistic variations in speech. Structured and informal practice were derived from the materials gathered. Problems experienced included initial resistance from staff and students to "common" language, and student interest in documentation of the variations being studied. (MSE)

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# Style and Situation:
# A Sociolinguistic Approach to Teaching Bahasa Indonesia

Edmund A Anderson
RELC, Singapore

Abstract

This paper will discuss the linguistic and presentational considerations involved in the development and field testing of the component of a nine-month intensive course in Indonesian which is devoted to learners' informal needs of affiliation and friendship as well as their work-related needs, by speaker, setting and topic.

The linguistic considerations are primarily sociolinguistic in nature, building on the notion of communicative competence, which incorporates authenticity into the materials to be used.

The presentational considerations struggle with the problem of maximizing the learning setting as a means of mastering speaking styles of Indonesian, from formal to casual.

The paper is based on the author's experience in Bandung, Indonesia, from 1975-1979, in establishing the aforementioned Indonesian course and field testing the materials.

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## The Program

The program established in Bandung, Indonesia is an intensive program in Indonesian (bahasa Indonesia) which lasts for nine months. These nine months constitute the training period during which it is hoped that learners, in addition to acquiring a good command of Indonesian, will accept as their own the goals of independence and involvement as a modus operandi for their continued learning after the completion of the structured nine-month program.

The materials used as guidelines for the establishment of the program were:

(1) Larson, Donald N. and Smalley, William A. BECOMING BILINGUAL: A GUIDE TO LANGUAGE LEARNING. Practical Anthropology: New Canaan, Ct., 1972,

(2) Larson, Donald N. DESCHOOLING LANGUAGE STUDY THROUGH INDEPENDENCE AND INVOLVEMENT. Toronto Institute of Linguistics: Toronto, 1974.

The nine months are divided into three three-month levels. Each level incorporates a different degree of emphasis on independence, from "high dependence" on the structured program at the beginning of Level 1 to rather "low dependence" (= independence, or high confidence and competence) at the end of Level 3. There is no variation throughout the course on the amount of involvement with Indonesian people, but there is, of course, a progressive increase in the students' competence in their involvement with the same.

The learning principle utilized is the learning cycle, consisting of four steps, which, if used consistently becomes in effect a learning spiral. The four steps are (1) Get What You Need, (2) Practice What You Get, (3) Use What You Practice, and (4) Evaluate. It should be obvious that the learning cycle is custom-made for the independent and involved learner. This kind of learner can identify what it is he/she wants to learn and then elicit a sample of whatever it is: a poem, short story, dialogue, speech, kind of behavior, etc. He/She can then practice it, use it and evaluate the process and plan for further learning steps.

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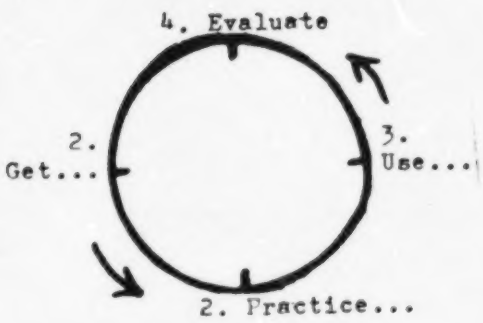
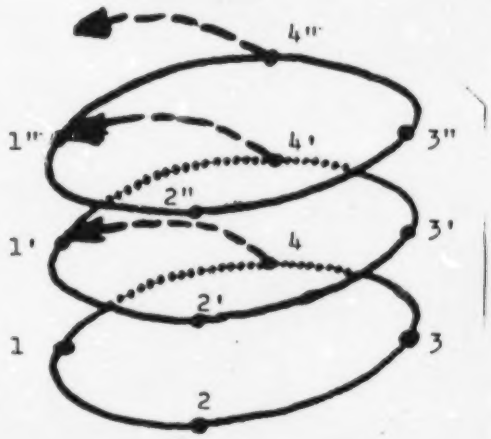
The Learning Cycle




The Learning Spiral




Timing

Most courses that mention styles of speech seem to treat the phenomenon as an "extra" feature to be given to the advanced student at the end of the course, after the learner has mastered the basic language.

Our course, by contrast, was built around the principle that whatever one says in any language fits into a sociolinguistic repertoire of styles. And so, what at first seems to be merely a question of timing, is actually a question of how language is perceived. Even the first 20 lessons, which are considered basic "tool kit" Indonesian, are later seen to be socially significant, that is, socially marked as that variety of Indonesian which is spoken among Strangers, in public places (markets, stores, train stations, etc.) about topics of general interest.

On the twenty-first day of organized study, the sociolinguistic principles involving the functional use of Indonesian in Indonesian society are introduced and learning of them, situation by situation, begins. For forty days, the students work with different combinations of speaker, location and topic, as illustrated in the following:

B. ADAPTING TO DIFFERENT SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Week 1. Talking to a Stranger. . .
21. . . . When another Stranger Enters.
22. . . . When an Acquaintance Enters.
23. . . . When an Associate Enters.
24. . . . When a Friend Enters.
25. . . . When a Relative Enters.
Week 2. Talking to a Relative. . .
26. . . . When another Relative Enters.
27. . . . When a Friend Enters.
28. . . . When an Associate Enters.
29. . . . When an Acquaintance Enters.
30. . . . When a Stranger Enters.
Week 3. Talking to an Associate . . .
31. . . . When a Relative Enters.
32. . . . When a Friend Enters.
33. . . . When another Associate Enters.
34. . . . When an Acquaintance Enters.
35. . . . When a Stranger Enters.

Week 4. Speaking in Public.
36. Responding to a Welcome.
37. Telling Something About Yourself.
38. Telling About an Experience.
39. Telling About Plans and Purposes.
40. Telling Something Good About Indonesia.

C. PUTTING EMOTIONS INTO WORDS

Week 1. How People Communicate Their Bad Feelings.
41. Feelings About Sickness.
42. A Death in the Family.
43. Frustrations with the Cost of Living.
44. Displeasure at Someone's Behavior.
45. Life's Hardships.

Week 2. How People Communicate Their Feelings of Sympathy:
46. Sickness: "You don't look well."
47. Sickness, again.
48. "You look sad."
49. "You look sad: 2"
50. "You look sad: 3"

Week 3. How People Communicate Their Good Feelings.
51. A Raise in Pay.
52. A Child's Wedding.
53. Owning a House.
54. Receiving a Gift: Anticipation.
55. A Son's Success in School.

Week 4. How People Share Others' Feelings of Joy.
56. Receiving a Gift.
57. Expecting to See a Loved One.
58. A Birth in the Family.
59. Finding Something Precious.
60. A Personal Achievement.

Getting Learning Material

Whereas the independent and involved learner can gather learning material to suit his/her own needs, it was found necessary for learners at the early stages (21 days) to be provided with material, if for no other reason than to use as a pump primer.

How is it possible to develop materials on speaking styles when the books on learning Indonesian are built around a structural approach, with virtually no mention of ranges of styles? In addition, at the time (1975), a few articles on the sociolinguistics of Indonesian were beginning to appear, but there was nothing on stylistic variation in Indonesian, as far as I knew. And so, what was I to do?

The linguistic principles clarified in the work of sociolinguistics, if true, must be in operation whether or not linguists have described them yet. I think this is good for applied linguists to remember. Linguistic descriptions probably follow behind the need for applications in the field more often than linguists would like to admit. But, too often, it seems as if applied linguists are nervous about doing something which has not been well described. I did not get around to describing the stylistic variation in the materials in Indonesian until 1982, which was just published in NUSA, Journal of Indonesian Languages and Linguistics, Vol. 15, Jakarta, entitled "The Meaning of Variation in Indonesian."

I set out to gather sociolinguistically sensitive Indonesian material in the following manner. I solicited the help of four Indonesian people (2 men and 2 women) in their late twenties to mid-forties. These four were in training to become our instructors in the program. I asked them to act out "as naturally as possible" a number of social situations involving the use of Indonesian, specified in terms of speakers (relationships between them: Stranger, Acquaintance, Co-worker, Friend and Family member; Sex; Relative Age; and Relative Status), settings and probable topics. They filled in the particulars.

The initial situations I needed concerned survival matters: how to buy food, how to get the oil changed in my motorcycle, how to order a rubber stamp for use on official stationery, etc. As I became acquainted with Indonesians, I was invited to weddings, engagement parties, meals in people's homes in celebration of special occasions, such as religious holidays, etc.

Each kind of situation, I had been led to expect, would possibly call for a designated style of speech with specialized vocabulary, grammar and perhaps pronunciation, accompanied by certain gestures thought to be appropriate, dealing with designated topics (and avoiding others), etc. Using a general descriptive grid of situations, I set out to elicit material by rotating the social factors for at least sixty such situations.

After acting out the situations "as naturally as possible," I played the recorded material back for my Indonesian helpers, and asked them if it was truly representative of behavior in those situations. Of course, this elicitation technique is problematical, due to the fact that people think they speak in a certain way, but actually speak differently in different situations. There was usually some discussion among them, from which I had the impression that they understood that I did not want only the formal, and certainly not artificially ornate, styles. The more elicitations conducted, the greater the helpers' ease and speed of performance, as evidenced by the decreasing amounts of discussion on each successive elicitation.

When the material had been listened to, sometimes two or three times, discussed and accepted by the helpers, I accepted it as a potential text to be used as a model. Of course, I would still have a safety feature by using it outside of the elicitation situation in the situation specified and observing people's reactions.

Next, I listened to these texts, and transcribed them in Indonesian orthography as well as I could. I then submitted my orthographic transcription to the helpers for correction. The corrected versions became the focal points of each lesson. From them were drawn material for pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary practice.

Class Presentation

The day was divided into structured practice and informal practice, as follows:

| Structured Practice (4½ hours) | Informal Practice (3½ hours) |
|---|---|
| (1) Get What You Need<br>Demonstration<br>Transcription<br>Understanding | (3) Use What You Practice<br>Simulation<br>Adaptation<br>Involvement |
| (2) Practice What You Get<br>Fluency Practice<br>Accuracy Practice<br>Pronunciation<br>Grammar<br>Vocabulary<br>Whole Text Practice | (4) Evaluate<br>"What did I learn?"<br>"How do I feel?" (about myself, about Indonesians, etc.)<br>"What did I do right?/wrong?"<br>"What should I do differently/ the same tomorrow?"<br>"What should I learn next?" |

These materials on stylistic variation encountered some initial resistance, some of it quite stiff, both from sponsors and from students. Opinions expressed took the form of anxious comments such as "We want our people to use only 'good Indonesian, not 'slang'." One sponsor even expressed that he hoped that the students would speak Indonesian so well that they could be examples to the Indonesian people themselves of how to speak their own language.

In these opinions, I discerned a misperception of the dynamics of language use in society, and so we countered by discussing with them the sociolinguistic aspects of the problem. Students would not be making frequent formal presentations in Indonesian in front of large groups of people, so why must they learn only formal Indonesian? Wasn't it true that they wanted to have Indonesians as friends and co-workers? If so, they would have to learn how to speak Indonesian in a way which symbolized the true relationship between them. Not to do so was to risk appearing to have a neo-colonialist mentality.

The intellectual curiosity of learners (all adults) presented a challenge as well. At the time (1975), there were no available sources of documentation of stylistic variation in Indonesian. We had to content ourselves, in meeting requests for information, with pointing up some of the obvious differences in styles and with appeals to the Indonesian instructors for their intuitive feelings and impressions as to the affective impression which is created by the use of the appropriate stylistic variants. The most helpful metaphor they developed was that general Indonesian is like a bowl of plain rice: healthy and nourishing, but not too tasty. The use of stylistic variants in the appropriate situation is like a bowl of plain rice with vegetable and salt fish (a delicacy in West Java) on the top. These reinforcements seemed to help the students and the sponsors to overcome their fears, and did lower the resistance to the materials. After nine months, of course, when our first group of students was out in the field, we had all the confirmation, as to the effectiveness of our approach, that we needed.

One experience which illustrates a pitfall which exacerbated our problems until it could be identified and remedied is the following. In the "Understanding" segment of the first step in the learning cycle, one of the instructors was confused as to how to explain the meaning of some of the verbal fillers and expressions whose major social meaning is "friendly, relaxed, informal." He was embarrassed because he felt he had to have an answer, and said these words and expressions "had no meaning," by which he meant conventional lexical meaning. The students were confused: "If they don't mean anything, why should we study them?"

As to problems of implementation, on the other side of the balance are the people who thrive on the idea of learning the, especially, informal stylistic forms, and then proceed to use them indiscriminantly in all situations, to the embarrassment of Indonesians, and themselves. The phenomenon is illustrated by a story of a young Indonesian English student who greeted a rather stiff, but friendly American woman at a social occasion with "Hey, M- A-, you ol s.o.b., how are you anyway?" When he discovered that the English of many Western movies is not generally appropriate in such social situations, his embarrassment was considerable. In short, then, this tendency had to be restrained within socially acceptable bounds among our more exhuberant students.

Because language in its everyday settings is spontaneous and based on needs, we became aware that we needed to be vigilant in the daily demonstrations of material in the plenary sessions as they tended to lose the features of spontaneity and degenerate into "language learning-ese" with its characteristic classroom (=flat) intonation patterns, and features which say "I can't wait until we are through with this." We countered this with consciousness raising among the instructors to make sure they understood what was behind the activities involved in learning stylistic variation, and that they could understand what they were doing when they fell into "l.l-ese." We wanted them to realize that the way they presented material whether in demonstration and in all steps of the structured practice must keep in mind the spontaneity of language in everyday life. I was satisfied that the lesson was effectively learned.

Evaluation of the Program

Evaluation of the program was conducted through a process of inter-subjective evaluations of both language aspects and non-language aspects, such as ability to work within the Indonesian context and world view. As such, we used no formal, standardized tests.

Throughout the nine months, the instructors evaluated the students monthly, covering pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and discourse (presentation of ideas using Indonesian). They also evaluated them on their ability to work in an Indonesian cultural context in a way which was meaningful to Indonesians (roles, definition of work, etc.). The intuitive feelings of the Indonesian instructors were highly prized since it gave a gestalt, rather than a minutely detailed description.

Sponsors evaluated the students from the perspective of general effectiveness in a posting after nine months. Sponsors, in general, rated the product of our program high.

Students, themselves, were not terribly positive about the learning experience until toward the end of the program, and those people who were desirous of working closely with Indonesians were the most appreciative of the approach.

An informal measure of success were the opinions of Indonesians who were not connected institutionally with the program.

Conclusions

For seasoned applied linguists, the conclusions will be perhaps self-evident from the preceding description. But one thing ought to be stated in conclusion, which is, that the phenomenon of stylistic variation in a language is not only unavoidable, but constitutes the only foundation for a serious language learning program, because it is in the essence of language, both living languages and in what we have preserved of the so-called dead languages.

It is also true that this kind of activity may need to be repeated when one moves to another part of Indonesia due to the regional variations of Indonesian. I found, for example, on moving to Surabaya from Bandung, that my West Javanese accent of Indonesian was noticeable to Indonesians there, mainly Javanese and Madurese.

Finally, I wish to express appreciation to Dr Teodoro Llamzon of the Philippines and Dr Bikram Das of India, my colleagues at RELC, for their helpful comments on this paper, and to Mr Peter Lowenberg, my predecessor at the Binational Center in Surabaya, Indonesia for graciously agreeing to read this paper by proxy.